

Cattle Producer's Handbook

Introduction Section

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INTRODUCTION

Cattle Producer's Handbook

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The *Cattle Producer's Handbook* is a collection of fact sheets that are resources for any size beef cattle operation. Material has been developed by the Western Beef Resource Committee, which consists of Cooperative Extension System animal scientists, veterinarians, and other specialists from Arizona, California, Colorado, Hawaii, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, Oregon, Utah, Washington, and Wyoming.

The committee set the following objectives:

1. To develop or collect as complete a set of informative material as can be found that has a bearing on beef production systems. The information in the Handbook is in brief, easy-to-read fact sheets that deal with specific subjects. They are written by specialists whom the committee considered the best authorities in a particular subject area.
3. To develop support material for the *Cattle Producer's Handbook* in the form of other media such as CDs, DVDs, Internet content, etc.

Regardless of where cattle producers are or how they operate, producers must manage within the confines of the biological facts of beef production. The following are facts that all cattle producers know and take for granted. Producers sometimes expect Mother Nature to bend her rules to fit their management plan. Facts that cannot be changed are:

1. An egg and a sperm must come together in the proper circumstances to make a new calf.
2. The length of pregnancy in beef cattle is approximately 282 days.
3. The normal cow takes approximately 40 days after calving to return to estrous and be prepared to start a new pregnancy.
4. The estrus cycle is approximately 21 days.
5. Puberty is a function of age and size.
6. Certain nutrients are required for growth and production.
7. Wide variation occurs in growth rate and in limits to that growth rate.

8. In most cases, the biological cycle of the cow must be managed within the climate and seasonal limitations of one locality.
9. Disease problems are a constant threat.
10. Cows and bulls pass on to their offspring both desirable and undesirable traits.

Every cattle producer, facing the formidable task of managing a beef herd to a profitable level, must take these biological facts into consideration. This must be done within the abilities, limits, philosophical knowledge, physical facilities, environment, finances, and labor the cattle producer has.

Important Questions to Ask

Most cattle producers would respond, "yes," if asked the question, "Would you like to be better at what you do or what you are tomorrow, next week, and next year?" Would you give a "yes" answer?

The major problem that most cattle producers face in getting to where they want to be or where they want to go with their operation is that these objectives have not been answered clearly enough. Before cattle producers can really get on the road to where they want to go, producers need to ask themselves these searching questions and give honest answers.

Why are you in cattle ranching? Is it to use capital? Is it to become employed as a laborer? Is it to use your managerial skills? Is it to employ your family? Is it because you want to be an independent business person? Is it because you enjoy living in the country? Is it because you enjoy working with animals? Is it because you want to be identified with a romantic period in history?

You may have answered, "yes," to all of these questions and justifiably so. They are all legitimate reasons for being in the cattle business. The priority that producers place upon these reasons may have a bearing upon the return received from each of these reasons. This also will have an impact on the management philosophy that develops in the beef production enterprise.

For example, if you are in the cattle ranching business to employ members of your family, you may not want to become as labor efficient as possible. If you are in the cow business to use capital investments to get the most return possible, your philosophy of management will be quite different.

If you will identify why **you** are doing beef cattle production and set goals to achieve the most return to the “why,” you will do a much better job of maximizing returns.

Goals in the Beef Game

What would a football game be without a goal? What would be the point of interest in a basketball game without the little hoop of iron hung on a frame at each end of the gymnasium? Goals give meaning, objective, or focus to things. They allow for achievement. They give order and stability to a game, a program—or life for that matter. With definite goals, “game plans” can be developed to achieve the goals. Goals must have the following characteristics:

Be Clearly Defined and Firmly Fixed

Can you imagine the frustration and anxiety of a basketball team or coach if the positions of the baskets were changed at any moment to another position on the court? Too often we are like this in our business objectives. We think somewhere down on the other end of the court there is a basket that we are going to make. But we are not real sure how we’ll count the points, what the goal will be, or where the end of the court is. Goals must be firmly fixed and identifiable.

Be Achievable

Let’s make another sports analogy. Would anyone play basketball or would basketball have any meaning if the basket were smaller than the ball or so high that no one could put the ball through the hoop? Of course not...

Have a Realistic Time Frame

Too often our goals are set with no time frame or with a time scheduled that is too narrow. Foreign visitors to this country frequently say that Americans are in too much of a hurry. We must be realistic in the timetable we set for reaching our goals.

Let’s take a look at some overall goals for a beef enterprise. Most of these are attained at some level and are seldom listed as goals. Perhaps the first objective or “goal” is:

- **Return on Investments**—These investments are in land, feed, water, equipment, and other items required to operate a beef enterprise. In this day of high money costs, a return must be realized.

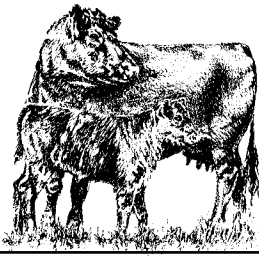
- **Provide Employment**—The enterprise could provide full-time employment or, as in the case of some beef operations, part-time employment. This can take the form of merchandising time that is otherwise unmarketable or labor time that is shared with other agricultural enterprises.
- **Use Resources**—This goal is often overlooked. It is established to use all of the energy derived from the land. It may be wasted ground such as ditch banks or drainage ditches. It may be using roughages in a crop rotation system or surplus feeds or our vast ranges for the grazing animals. The goal should be to use these resources to the fullest and still retain a maximum sustained yield of resources.
- **Personal Satisfaction**—If you won’t like cattle or if you don’t like the outside activities associated with cattle, then all other goals become much more elusive.
- **Achievement**—Although this is the last goal listed here, it is perhaps more important than all others and is the basic reason for establishing intermediate goals. There must be some sense of achievement before one can do well in anything. These achievements are reached by knowing you are making things better than they were. You are able to try new ideas or can set production (intermediate) goals and achieve them by your own plans and efforts.
- **Intermediate goals**—Short-range objectives that, if we achieve successfully, move us closer to our main goal. In setting intermediate goals you are able to measure progress and achieve a sense of accomplishment. The value of intermediate goals, again, may be explained by a football game analogy. A football team may be 70 yards from scoring a touchdown. Its ultimate goal is to win by scoring more points than the opposition. Team members know that touchdowns are seldom made on 70-yard plays. The game plan from that position on the field calls for a series of first downs. The intermediate goal is to make another first down and continue to do so until the team is in scoring range. So the team’s intermediate goals become not 6 points, but a series of first downs that will lead to scoring the touchdown or 6 points and achieving the goal.
- The long-range goals you set for your operation will depend on your answer to the original question, “Why are you in cattle ranching?” Don’t forget that you also have to set intermediate goals to measure your progress and to give you a sense of achievement.

Hopefully, the Cattle Producer’s Handbook will help you reach your goals and give you the greatest possible returns to your “why” for being in cattle ranching.



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Integrated Resource Management: A Concept to Provide Profitable Resource Management for Cattle Producers

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What Is Integrated Resource Management?

As applied to cattle producers, Integrated Resource Management (IRM) is a beef management concept in which the key performance indicators of an operation are analyzed, decisions are made, and action is taken to ensure maximum profitability and competitiveness through the optimum use of all available resources.

What Is the National Integrated Resource Management Coordinating Committee?

The National Integrated Resource Management Coordinating Committee (NIRMCC) is a team of volunteer specialists working together to help coordinate IRM efforts nationally. They provide producers and organizations with information on establishing IRM teams and concepts to improve the profitability of beef operations.

NIRMCC volunteers are producers, veterinarians, researchers, Extension system experts, agricultural lenders, and other agribusiness professionals dedicated to improving the economic efficiency of cattle operations through effective resource management.

What Is an IRM Program?

An IRM program, developed by an IRM team, is a sequence of actions that are both educational and responsive to the needs of cattle producers wanting to improve their management practices. The steps in an

IRM program are designed to isolate and solve production problems using existing technology, resources, and expertise. If technology to solve the problem does not exist, then the need for new research may be indicated and encouraged.

What Is an IRM Team or Committee?

Application of the IRM concept begins with the establishment of advisory teams or committees at the farm/ranch, county, or state level. These teams allow a pooling of expertise and technology directed at solving producer problems on the farm/ranch or in the community.

The IRM farm/ranch team of specialists includes, but is not limited to, a practicing veterinarian, agricultural lender, and Extension agricultural agent or livestock consultant.

County IRM committees are comprised of farmers, ranchers, veterinarians, agricultural lenders, Extension system personnel, and others allied to the industry.

A state IRM committee may also include producers, veterinarians, and research and Extension specialists, as well as allied industry representatives.

The team approach is beneficial as it provides problem-solving expertise from multiple disciplines, as well as an acceleration in the rate of technology transfer to, and adoption by, cattle producers for the improvement of their resources.

Why Will My Lender, Veterinarian, My Extension Agent, and My Animal Health Supplier Want to Help Me Do IRM?

It is in the best interest of each of these people that you not only survive in the cattle business, but that you are as profitable as possible. These people can do their jobs better if you are successful.

How Will I Benefit As a Producer?

Benefits from an IRM Beef Program are:

1. Continued flow of technology that is applicable and useful to the industry.
2. Continued identification and prioritizing of research needs of the industry.
3. Demonstration of the application of proven and profitable practices.
4. Improved profitability and competitiveness in the meat industry.

What Factors Make the IRM Concept Work?

Cooperation—The IRM concept is effective because it is a cooperative effort by many disciplines interested in optimizing all resources for improved profitability. All disciplines of the land-grant College of Agriculture are involved in lending their expertise to the program, wherever and whenever appropriate. Extension and research services join with beef producers in identifying needs and opportunities, and in solving problems.

Thrust—The IRM concept works because activities are aggressive and meaningful to the industry. Thrust also implies power behind the program, power that comes from the initial efforts of the producers, the College of Agriculture, and agribusiness.

Responsiveness—The IRM concept also works because it is responsive to the needs of the industry. Responsiveness between producers, Extension agents, and various disciplines of the College of Agriculture permit programs, or lines of action, to be developed quickly. Responsiveness also means that all participants are aware of their joint responsibilities to one another, and are willing to support the total program.

Informational—The IRM concept works because its main objective is to provide the producers with information to improve their beef operations. These educational objectives are:

1. To explore with producers their problems and opportunities, demonstrate profitable new or improved methods of operation, and add to their base knowledge of profitable management practices.
2. To demonstrate results of research and identify areas where further research is needed.
3. To continue to develop a data base and a profile of the beef industry in the state.
4. To integrate the IRM concept and successful applications into College of Agriculture teaching programs.

When Does IRM Application Begin?

Once a team or committee has been established, the application of the IRM concept begins with the identification of a problem or opportunity. When a problem exists, its effects can usually be measured in terms of production units. Opportunities to improve efficiency are not always as clear cut but usually are revealed through record analysis. Therefore, the availability of a detailed data base is important to IRM success. If one is not available, it must be developed.

Why Is a Detailed Data Base So Important?

The most important measurement to commercial cattle producers is profit from beef sold. In the IRM Beef Program, data on four other indicators are essential to good program development—four measurable indicators that have been recognized by the Beef Improvement Federation. These four key indicators on herd performance are open cows, growth, length of calving season, and death loss.

How Is an IRM Program Activated?

The first goal must be to collect enough data on the foregoing key indicators to assess accurately where IRM programs or lines of action should focus. Without such base data, programs become lines of reaction often termed “firefighting.”

Once data are available on the key indicators, the line of action becomes obvious. If data on any of the key indicators suggest an unsatisfactory condition, the next step should be to analyze that key indicator for the cause of the problem.

Therefore, the next line of action involves further analysis to determine the key cause of the unsatisfactory performance. For example: having an unsatisfactory number of open cows has only four key causes (disease, bulls, nutrition, and management).

To follow through on the key indicator of open cows you use only two approaches to determine if disease is the cause—physical examination of the open cows or a clinical examination. The same approach would be used to determine if bulls were the key cause. Other key causes would surface if nutrition or management were the problem areas.

Once the key problem(s) have been isolated, the line of action becomes one of implementing management changes to solve the problem. After the management changes have been implemented, data should be collected to determine the key results.

Is There an Aid to Gathering Data?

Yes, the “Red Pocket Field Book” has been developed to record the key performance indicators of herd production as established by BIF. The field book is a tool for establishing a beef industry data base at the ranch, county, state, or national level, and the data format is compatible to computer software analysis.

Production of the Red Pocket Field Book was coordinated by the NIRMCC and sponsored by local and national groups and corporations. It is available on request from state cattle associations and distributed by the Cooperative Extension System in participating states.

What Completes a Program?

The program is not complete until its results and impact have been shared with others through meetings, tours, demonstrations, publications, or other activities that report on the lines of action taken and encourage adoption by other beef producers to improve the profitability of their own operation.

How Can I Find Out More About the IRM Concept?

Contact the Cooperative Extension System office in your county. If the Extension personnel at the county level haven't received training in IRM, state Extension staff should be able to help you set up the IRM team and begin to set goals for your operation.

National IRM activities are being coordinated by:

The National IRM Coordinating Committee

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P.O. Box 3469

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Details of the Integrated Resource Management concept are also available on videotape at a cost of \$15.



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